Where Are All Our Teachers?

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In many parts of the United States, students, parents, and educators keep asking about the teacher shortage and what can be done to end it.

Our teacher recruitment system has been blinking red for a long time, and it seems as if the people in charge decided not to do anything about it. The history of teaching shows that schools have been overly dependent on a captive labor force.

From Colonial times until the early 1900s, women flocked to teaching. In the mid-1800, feminism and Dame school feminized teaching. In the early 1900s, teachers (now 75% women) began to rebel against poor pay and the lack of control over their careers—this led to unions in America. Things remained relatively calm from the 1930s to the 1950s, and schools became complacent. As other occupations became open to educated women in the 1980s, women began to turn their backs on teaching careers (PBS.org, 2017).

A nonprofit Learning Policy Institute report found that teacher education enrollment dropped from 691,000 to 451,000, a 35% reduction between 2009 and 2014 (Sutcher et al., 2016). The U. S. Department of Education reports that a majority of states have identified teacher shortages in mathematics (forty-seven states and the District of Columbia), special education (forty-six states and D.C.), science (forty-three states), world languages (forty states and D.C.), career and technical education (thirty-two states), teachers of English learners (thirty-two states), art, music, and dance (twenty-eight states), and English (twenty-seven states) (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Here's an example of how things are playing out in one mid-western state. In 2003-04, Ohio's public and private nonprofit colleges and universities awarded 55,207 bachelor's degrees, 6,759 of them, or 12.2%, were in education. By 2014-15, bachelor's degrees had risen to 69,592, but only 4,983 were in education, shrinking the share of education degrees to 7.3%. The number of newly awarded bachelor's degrees in education has dropped by more than one-fourth in Ohio since the 2003-04 school year, challenging the state's reputation as a fount of new teachers. Furthermore, prospective new teachers aren't seeking degrees in the specialties needed most (Edwards, 2016).

In the early '90s, Ohio's department of education reported shortages in these areas: Physical Science (Grades 7–12), Severe Behavior Handicapped (K–Grade 12), and Visually Handicapped (K–Grade 12). For the 2016-17 school year, statewide teacher shortages are reported in virtually every area, including:

Arts, English/Language Arts, Foreign Languages, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Developmentally Handicapped, Multi-Handicapped, Preschool Handicapped, Speech/Language Pathology, Severe Behavior Handicapped, Specific Learning Disabled, and TESOL (Speakers of Other Languages).

What can school leaders do to turn this trend around?

•The first step is to admit that we have a huge problem. Admit that we need to do something dramatically different regarding recruiting teachers. The steering on the recruitment bus isn't

wobbly - it is on its side in a ditch! We have surveyed school districts across the country, asking them to describe how they recruit new teachers. Their responses indicate that many school systems have not kept pace with the recruitment process and best practices of other fields.

• Leaders' recruitment strategies are hyperlocal, untargeted, or nonexistent.

•Leaders' do not seem to understand that they are competing with other school districts and companies with more sophisticated human capital systems and offer more competitive salaries.

• School districts' application and selection processes often emphasize static application

materials—such as applications, resumes, and proof of certifications—over performance-based measures. This is where administrators could create surveys or personality inventories that look for emotional intelligence/tolerance to help determine the "right" fit for their district.

• School systems do not have a clearly defined value proposition that convincingly lays out the reasons – beyond money benefits – why teaching in their district is attractive. For example, can your recruitment team layout twenty-five reasons why a person would enjoy living and working in your community? Can your team explain how the teacher retirement system can compensate for a lower salary? What type of training does your district offer in terms of social and emotional learning to educators to help arm them with an arsenal of many ways to teach and for their students to learn?

• School districts should devote more time and resources to intentional recruitment and begin the process with first- and second-year college students while they are still considering college majors.

• Leaders' should be able to demonstrate to new teachers how they will be provided

opportunities to build their skills, like social and emotional learning and lesson development, and gradually assume increased responsibility.

• Leaders' should consider creating teacher residency programs that provide apprenticeships in high-need districts under the wing of expert teachers. Recruited teachers, who complete their training, would be hired and paid for their training time with years of service.

• School districts should initiate "grow-your-own" programs enabling young people and paraprofessionals to get prepared and come back and teach in the communities they have lived in. A great way to incorporate this is to have trained staff in social and emotional learning. Students that thrive in a growth mindset are great picks to be teacher helpers and to recruit for future jobs.

• Given that 20% to 30% of all new teachers nationwide leave the field entirely within the first five years of their career, alternative certification programs and schools need to be better prepared with two-year staff on-boarding and induction programs (Sutcher, et al., 2016). The current certification and mentorship programs leave too much to chance and depend on the mentor's quality. Those who mentor need to receive an additional stipend and may not be fully invested in the success of their newly recruited teacher. Administrators need to actively recruit the best mentors who want the extra money and have the best social and emotional skills, so they can relate to new teachers and their specific needs as they begin their careers.

•How many first or second-year teachers are asked to resign due to housekeeping issues such as failure to complete a field trip form or attend a fundraiser? Schools with high turnover rates should be treated like low test scores. The district or state department of education steps in to identify issues and work with that school to fix them.

•Make teacher certification national instead of state-by-state. Prospective teachers must pass an exam specific to the state they want to work in. But if a teacher wants to move from Pennsylvania to California, they can't immediately apply for jobs there. By having a national certification exam, teachers would have more mobility to go where needed.

- Leaders shouldn't assume it's just about the money. Recruitment and retention start and ends with respect or lack thereof. Education in the twenty-first century can arguably be one of the most challenging times to be a teacher. Beyond low pay and politics, teachers are undervalued in that they must obtain higher education and continue to pay for license renewal by taking ongoing Professional Development. They are held to high expectations from our society while being treated and paid like high school graduates.

Education is the cornerstone of any society. Our nation has changed drastically from Colonial times, but our schools have not kept pace. Changing our culture for the better starts with better teacher recruitment programs in all districts; the recipe is not that complicated: a strong team of teachers to manage their careers; add to the mix a curriculum that isn't solely focused on test scores and standards but includes positive social and emotional skills development. Providing students with a passion for learning and the skills to accept themselves and others will help close gaps and allow all students to learn. This, in turn, creates a higher graduation rate in our schools, increasing opportunities for at-risk students to get out of gangs, poverty, and drugs and want to be teachers for the next generation.

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